

THE LAST 24 HOURS OF THE YEAR OF PEACE

Part II

An eyewitness arriving in Moscow from California early in January 1986 said that he had watched a two-minute video clip on NBC News about an outdoor New Year Party in Moscow: against the background of a giant video screen showing the Soviet leader, General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, extending New Year greetings to the nation, groups of people in fancy dress, mummers and folk groups were having a great time, dancing in the street, singing songs and otherwise enjoying themselves on New Year's night. "It was so totally unexpected and unusual," continued the visitor from California, "that many in America simply did not believe what they saw". Any way I could check if it really happened?

Nothing could be easier - why don't we have a repeat performance on the New Year night of 31 December 1986? The Moscow City Council has already decided to make New Year festivities on Old Arbat pedestrian mall and in Kalinin Avenue, where the giant videoscreen is, a new Moscow tradition.

It looks as if the new tradition meets the desire of many people in different countries to experience distant proximity and a sense of simultaneity of life for all of us on the planet Earth. And what better excuse can there be than an outdoor New Year party?

But who would write a script for a global New Year party involving two billion participants? After the success of the global Live Aid concert on 13 July 1985 which brought together a phenomenal worldwide audience to match the importance of the

event, a global New Year Party with a focal point in Moscow is not so wild a dream. Still, how does one go about writing a script for such a megavision? People on different continents will be thrilled by experiencing a sense of distant proximity and might gladly go along with the idea of lighting candles. As a result two billion people across the globe will see one another via space bridges. Others, like me, will insist that enabling two billion people to witness the sunrise simultaneously at a particular point on the globe, say, at the megalithic observatory Hagar Qim on the Island of Malta, a perfect location for such a soul-warming experience, is not a bad idea, either. Still others will hail the two billion candles idea and the sunrise idea as long as both are accompanied by a simultaneous meditation and prayer of two billion souls on the subject of eternal peace, the immortality of the human race and the banishment of the terrible weapons of mass destruction from the face of the earth by the year 2000 ...

We should start on a collective script by united efforts immediately, and work quickly guided by the advice left to us by Socrates to the effect that one should find out the truth about the subject one praises, select its best elements and arrange them in the best possible fashion. If we do that, the success of the proposed global New Year party will be assured.

Perhaps the only thing that might give cause for concern to some is how are we to understand "the last 24 hours" of the Year of Peace. To put everyone at ease I suggest that the future scenario should include a call for concluding, just as the Earth makes its final revolution of 1986 round its axis, international

treaties to run to the end of the century. Alaska and Moscow, for instance, might conclude an agreement whereby just as the clock on the Spassky Tower of the Moscow Kremlin begin to strike midnight Alaska will send New Year greetings to the rejoicing crowd in front of the giant videoscreen in Kalinin Avenue and Moscow will return the greetings twelve hours later when the New Year hits Alaska.

In the fifteen years remaining to the year 2000 a new generation will have grown up both in Alaska and in Moscow and the young people will know that on New Year's they will have the pleasant task to think up a surprise for their counterparts in the Western hemisphere that will make them feel happy. This is just a brief episode from the crowded programme of the seemingly endless 24 hours during which the nations of the world will be totally preoccupied with trying to come up with the most ingenious ideas designed to give joy and happiness to each other.

If we do this the outgoing year of 1986, proclaimed by the United Nations as the Year of Peace, will mark the dawn of a new "golden age" in which you and I, and our nations, will live in a world of friendly cooperation and harmony.

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